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Author(s): John Dewey

Source: *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Apr., 1918), pp. 385-400

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29738253>

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THE JOURNAL OF RACE DEVELOPMENT

Vol. 8

APRIL, 1918

No. 4

INTERNAL SOCIAL REORGANIZATION AFTER THE WAR

By John Dewey, LL.D., Professor in Columbia University

Many of you have doubtless read that remarkable pronouncement to which the English labor party, or at least a committee of it, has issued regarding its policy in the social and industrial reorganization for the period immediately following the war. One of the striking sentences that introduces that document is that war is consuming the very basis of the peculiar social order in which it has arisen; that the war, in short, is consuming not merely munitions and steel and ships and human lives, but the social order out of which it arose. The same document refers to a statement by a Japanese statesman that the present war represents the collapse of European civilization. And they go on to say that it does mark, if not the death, in Europe, of civilization, at any rate the culmination and collapse of a distinctive industrial civilization which the workers will not seek to reconstruct.

These, perhaps, are extreme statements. But they come, at all events, from an influential section. They represent the opinions of the organized wage earners of Great Britain, the best organized laborers as laborers, probably, in the world. But we have all of us seen statements, which if not so extreme, would have seemed extreme to the point of exaggeration only a few years ago—statements coming from such very different quarters as Mr. Schwab, the steel magnate, in this country, Cardinal Bourne, of the Roman Catholic Church in England, Mr. Ralph Adams Cram, the architect. Coming from men of very unlike antecedents and outlook, they agree that, in all human probability, the

world faces, as an indirect consequence of the war, serious and profound internal changes, internal reorganization; and they all agree that these changes have to be met and forestalled with sympathy and intelligence on the part of the community as a whole, unless we are to drift into a time of serious internal disorder and unrest.

An English journal of trade and finance, a class journal of finance, remarked a little while ago that the war had revealed that the true wealth of England consists not in its capital, but in its human resources, in the enterprise, the initiative, the enduring, organizing power, the skill and industry of the men and the women. It is that point, perhaps, which the war has made to stand out, that though we are living in a mechanical civilization, and living in a war which is a mechanical war beyond anything known in the past; yet, after all, it is not the gun so much as the man behind the gun, and not so much the man behind the gun as the man in the field and in the factory, and the women in the home and in the shop and in the kitchen, that are really determining the outcome of this war. All other wars have been, to a large extent, wars of armies, wars of those who have been expressly mobilized for military service; but it is the commonest of commonplaces about the present war that the men on the front, the men in the trenches, the men in uniform, represent merely the first line of that larger army which includes practically the entire organization of all of the people. Now, it is because this war has thrown such a strain upon the entire economic, industrial and social organization, that it is so fraught with symptoms of change. We need to ask ourselves what are the chief weaknesses in the existing order which have been brought to light by the excessive stress and strain of war. In general, of course, those weaknesses are all of the same sort. War, whatever else its qualities and traits, at all events represents a necessity of unity of action, of organized, coöperative action, for a public, general, and common purpose and end; and the weaknesses that have been revealed exhibit the extent to which that life which we call social has been organized and arranged for private and conflicting purposes, rather than

for a common and public end. They show that because of disposition of our affairs upon this private, particular and conflicting basis, we have failed to secure that stability of organization, that efficiency of conjoined action, which the modern world demands.

Now, some of these weaknesses (I rather should say all of them) most people had been conscious of before the war. There have been, in one sense, no absolutely new revelations regarding the weak points in our social fabric, but the war has been nevertheless a tremendous education. It has thrown into relief upon a large scale, has projected on a map as it were, a picture which he who runs may read. It has taken the discussion of these weaknesses and defects out of the region of academic discussion and made them a matter of general knowledge and of public interest.

The first of the deficiencies which I will mention as having to be cared for in any effective reorganization which may take place after the war is the failure of our social order in the past to secure to its members steady and useful employment. It would be difficult to bring any more severe indictment against anything that calls itself a civilization, than the fact that it is not able to utilize the energy, physical, intellectual and moral, of the members who are desirous and anxious of rendering some kind of service, the production of some kind of needed and useful commodity; that it has not been able systematically to give all of its members a chance to do something. The evil, and the unnecessary character of the evil of unemployment is, then, the thing which I would put first, because it represents, in anything that professes to be civilization, the most obvious and definite point of weakness.

Now, this is serious, not merely from the standpoint of the enormous poverty and misery which insecure and precarious employment entails upon a large part of the population, but, if possible, even more serious because of the undermining of morale, of character, which comes with such a situation as this. We all know how demoralizing charity is. Every society of organized charity is teaching and constantly preaching the evils of indiscriminate charity,

how it destroys the character of those who become its recipients. Cannot we generalize this lesson and apply it to the whole industrial situation? What is the effect upon the self-respect of the large classes of men and women who periodically, once in so often, find themselves in large numbers thrown out of employment, and find that they have to beg, not for charity, but for even a chance to do work in turning out commodities or in rendering services which society actually needs? The undermining of confidence in oneself, of respect for oneself, the undermining of faith or belief in the world and in others that comes because of precarious and insecure tenure of employment is I think impossible to overestimate. When people find that they cannot do things that they are capable of doing, the attitude that comes toward the world is either one of impotence and enfeeblement, or else one of bitterness and hostility. Now, these things are, perhaps, sufficiently obvious. They are not new. There was plenty of discussion of the problem of unemployment and the remedies for it, before the war, but the war in its conduct has made the consciousness of it more acute and more general, and it has shown that the problem is not inevitable, that it is capable of human administration and handling. It has proved that it is possible for men, pooling and organizing their intelligence and experience, and having the authority of the government behind them, to take hold of the industrial and economic processes and see to it, even in a period of such great stress as during the war, that no man or woman who is capable of work shall lack useful, steady, and reasonably remunerative employment.

Another phase of the unemployment problem is that of the leisure class, so called. You may have heard the anecdote of the foreign critic who said to an American young woman that the great lack of American life was the absence of a professional leisure class; and she said, "Oh, no; we have them, only we call them tramps!" But unfortunately not even in this country does the professional leisure class consist entirely of tramps. We have the unemployed not only at the lower end of the social and industrial scale, but we

have them at the upper end, also, of the industrial and economic scale—the parasites, the persons who live for display and luxury, instead of from the fruits of social service actually rendered.

Now, the war has made emphatic, self-conscious, the term “slacker.” Is there anything worse, anything more contemptible or obnoxious, in social slackers in times of war than in times of peace? Will not the pressure on everybody today for what he can do in this time of stress remain after the war in an increased social contempt directed at all persons and all classes who persistently remain slackers, parasites, from the standpoint of engaging in occupations which perform a work useful to society?

The second evil that I would mention is the degraded and inhuman standard, or scale, of living which is found on the part of so many of the industrial population—of course, partly as a consequence of chronic employment or, at least, insecure employment, but partly because of the low rate of return for employment. We are accustomed, of course, to connect low wages and lack of work with poverty and suffering, but we too often fail to translate poverty and the misery that goes with it into terms of the general vitiation, the general deterioration of the scale of life on the part of a large element of the population. We fail to note what an unhuman lowering it means of the standard of physical health—though here again was a point that was being agitated more and more, even before the war, involving a consideration of the question of the socially unnecessary deaths, illnesses, accidents and incapacitations that come from the bad economic conditions under which so much of modern industry is carried on. You may have seen the statistics which were collected some time ago—not very long ago—by the department of Child Welfare in Washington, showing the relative chances of life for children born in the well-to-do portions of the population, as compared with the similar chances on the part of children of the wage-earning class. The loss there is merely one symptom, of this lowered, this almost inhuman, standard of living under which a considerable part of the population exists. It af-

fects not merely the bodily health, nutrition, nourishment, physical vigor, et cetera, but it enters also the aesthetic and the intellectual scale. We are too apt to pride ourselves upon our public and universal system of education without knowing that the great majority of the population get the benefit only of the more rudimentary and elementary phase of our educational system, and that by far the larger percentage of children leave the public schools before they have an education which any one of us—any member of the well-to-do and cultivated portions of society—would regard as any education at all. They leave us with the ability to read and write, to figure, with a little geographical and historical knowledge, and a miscellaneous acquaintance with trivial literature, but at an age so early that it is not possible for them to have reached, under the influences of education, a matured, trained intelligence. If they rise then, if they have the ability to rise, it is rather because of the native superiority which they retain than because of the training which they have received under our educational system. I need not dwell upon this. We need only to think of the conditions under which masses of our populations live, not merely in the slums, but wherever there is a congested industrial population, to realize how low, as compared with the attained standards of the well-to-do element of the population their plane of living really is.

In the third place, the war has revealed the serious weaknesses and defects which exist with respect to efficiency of production and distribution. Now, this is the particular phase of the matter upon which our existing old social order most prided itself. It might have admitted that it had not done so well with the human side of the problem, but it has been contended that, so far as efficiency in the invention, organization and utilization of the machinery of production and distribution is concerned, the present age is almost infinitely in advance of any that has preceded. Of course, in a certain sense, as compared with older civilizations—those that came before the great industrial revolution—this is true enough; for these mechanical inventions are, of course, the product of scientific discovery.

They are the product of the release of men's minds in the study of nature and the mystery of natural forces. It is a great mistake to suppose that our mechanical inventions of machines and implements—the steam engine, the telegraph, the telephone, the motor car, and the other agencies of production and distribution—are the actual fruit of the present industrial order. On the contrary, they are the fruit of the discoveries of a comparatively small number of scientific men who have not labored for recognition and who have never got it, very much—at least, in the way of pecuniary recognition. It simply happened that conditions were such that the men of means, men possessed of the financial and pecuniary resources, could utilize these fruits of natural science.

Furthermore, efficiency is not an absolute thing; but, of course, as every engineer tells us, it is a matter of ratio. Efficiency is a matter of the ratio which the actual output bears to the available resources; and looked at from that standpoint, not in comparison with the output of past ages, but as a matter of ratio which exists now between the present output and the resources now available, we cannot pride ourselves on having attained any great amount of even industrial efficiency in production. I need hardly remind you of the fact that when greater efficiency was required in England and in this country, the government had to take charge of the distributing agencies, the railroads. I need not remind you of the breakdown in the production and distribution of coal, from which we suffered a little while ago; and however much or however little the blame for that is to be laid at the doors of any particular individuals, the real difficulty, of course, goes much further back. It goes back to the fact that we have had production and distribution organized on a non-social basis—a basis of pecuniary profit. And when they suddenly had to be switched over to the basis of public need and public service, they naturally broke down. The great inefficiency here is, however, the failure to utilize human power. The great advance has, of course, been in the utilizing of natural power—steam and electricity, the machines, implements, and so on; but we

have not succeeded in engaging, enlisting and releasing available human energy. Even before the war, the great employers of labor and those who were compelled to make a study of the labor problem were coming to realize that the problem was increasingly a psychological problem due to the failure of work, under present conditions, to enlist the interest and the attention of the great masses of the wage earners. What is called the "turn over" of labor, the fact that so many men have to be hired and then fired in order to keep a certain average number at work, is simply one symptom of the breakdown of our industrial system on the human side. I heard the other day of one of our new shipyards on the New Jersey coast where, in order to keep a thousand men steadily at work a week, they had to hire 1200 men a week—that is to say, they had to hire 50,000 men a year to keep 1000 men at work a year. Now, that, of course, is a very large average, fifty to one, but I saw, as you may have seen in today's paper, in the report of the Pennsylvania Railroad, that in order to keep 250,000 men steadily at work, they had to engage, during the past year, 250,000 more—and the Pennsylvania Railroad has the reputation of being, on the whole, if not *the* best, one of the very best organized industrial enterprises in the United States. Now, that is simply a symptom of the fact that men's minds, hearts, thoughts, interests, are not engaged, under the present system, in the work which they are doing, and that there is, consequently, an enormous waste and inefficiency. It is said that in many industries in England, the average output since the war is higher than the highest estimate of the industrial expert, the industrial labor engineer, before the war: in other words, the average laboring person, under the increased stimulus, the interest which he takes in his work because of the war, is doing more now beyond the limit that the labor expert thought was possible for the most skilled laborer before the war. In this country, many persons have estimated that the average efficiency of the average workman, under ordinary conditions, is about 40 per cent as compared with what the individual might do if he took anything like a personal, not to say vital, interest in his work.

Now, this is serious not merely because of the relative failure of product and the waste of energy, but because of the intellectual and moral deterioration which inevitably occurs when large bodies of people are doing things for which they do not care, to which they have an aversion, and which do not in any way appeal to them. The rapid growth of migratory labor, vagrant and tramp labor, is another evidence of the intellectual and moral deterioration that comes. I suppose almost every adult person who has a job in life which interests him, which appeals to him intellectually and morally, would say that his occupation, together with his personal relations to his family and friends, is the great, steadying influence in his life, the axis about which his activities are organized, that which gives his conduct stability, that which gives his thoughts, his emotions and interests direction. Now, when a person is separated or divorced from interest in his work, you have a psychological and moral phenomenon of almost incalculable significance.

Another failure on the side of human efficiency is the failure to detect and utilize the great variety of abilities which actually exist in the population. A colleague of mine made a study of the distribution of men of science in this country, taking those who now have a reasonable standing as men of science. He traced back their childhood education and early environment. He found that these New England states produced, in proportion to the population, a number of scientific men which is out of all ratio to the corresponding number produced in the southern states. Now, I do not think those of us who are New England born ought to pride ourselves that there is superior hereditary native ability on the part of the Yankee. It is simply an illustration of the compelling power and the stimulating, selective power of environment, including education, social prestige, demand, and all the other factors. When you get a figure of, say, twenty-five to one, it gives a definite picture of the amount of talent, the amount of ability and capacity, which is left dormant, latent, unutilized under our present social system. When we consider that the mass of the

population are wage earners, and, as I have already said, that the great mass of the population leave school and systematic, educational opportunities cease, somewhere between the age of twelve and fourteen, when they have got along to the fifth or sixth grade of the elementary school, we may apprehend that the amount of waste which comes from unutilized capacity in the present social order is literally incalculable. The abilities which are stimulated by the present order in industry are great, but they are very one-sided. What is especially stimulated, because it is especially demanded and rewarded, of course, in our present system, is a highly specialized form of ability—pecuniary and financial ability. Even the technological ability, the scientific and engineering ability, is nowhere nearly as highly stimulated or rewarded as is the particular kind of financial and pecuniary ability that goes with capacity to command a market and secure a sale in the market for goods. The artistic capacities and abilities, a large part of the scientific capacity, a considerable portion, as I intimated, of technological ability, and many, if not most, forms of social capacity, ability to inspire and to lead others remain only partially stimulated.

Now, in such a situation as this, we are not, I think, entitled to unthinking optimism about the certainty of great progress or about the particular direction which social reorganization will take after the war. There is going to be, of course, a very great demand and a very great pressure, especially from the side of labor, as is indicated in this British document to which I have referred; but there will also be a very great inertia, very great obstacles and difficulties to contend with. We are not entitled to assume that automatically there is going to be a desirable reorganization and reconstruction after the war. We may, possibly—it is conceivable—go through a long period of social drifting and social unrest. The question is whether society, because of the experience of the war, will learn to utilize the available intelligence, the insight and foresight which are available, in order to take hold of the problem and to go at it, step by step, on the basis of an intelligent program—a program

which is not too rigid, which is not a program in the sense of having every item definitely scheduled in advance, but which represents an outlook upon the future of the things which most immediately require doing, trusting to the experience which is got in doing them to reveal the next things needed and the next steps to be taken. Now, the one great thing that the war has accomplished, it seems to me, of a permanent sort, is the enforcement of a psychological and educational lesson. Before the war, most persons would have said, who recognized these evils: Well, they are very great. We all recognize them. We deplore them, but the whole situation is so big and so complicated that it is not possible to do anything about it. We have got to wait for the slow process of evolution. We have got to wait for the working out of unconscious, natural law to accomplish anything serious and important in the way of reorganization. Well, I think the war has absolutely put an end to the right to the claim of anybody to say things of that sort. It is proved now that it is possible for human beings to take hold of human affairs and manage them, to see an end which has to be gained, a purpose which must be fulfilled, and deliberately and intelligently to go to work to organize the means, the resources and the methods of accomplishing those results. There was a saying, made famous by the Boer War, and largely through the writings of Mr. Wells the novelist, about "muddling through somehow." Now you might call it muddling through, or trusting to evolution: it does not make much difference in the practical effect. That was the general attitude, I think, even of well-intentioned people—people who recognized before the war these evils of which I have been speaking and who hoped for a better world, but under the stress of war it has been found possible to get hold, if not of all the brains of the nation, of at least a considerable part of them and of its executive and administrative ability, and to systematize and mobilize them as well as the physical and natural forces, to do a certain job, to realize a definite end and aim—the job which had to be done, and the end which had to be secured.

Now, in view of this situation, it seems to me that we cannot in any good conscience return, after the war, to the old period of drifting, so-called evolution, as a necessary method of procedure. The real question with us will be one of effectively discerning whether the intelligent men of the community really want to bring about a better reorganized social order. If the desire, the will and the purpose are strong enough, it has been demonstrated that, under conditions of very great strain—abnormal strain and pressure—human beings can get together coöperatively and bring their physical resources and their intellectual resources to bear upon the problem of managing society, instead of letting society drift along more or less at the mercy of accident.

That is the great psychological lesson, it seems to me, of the war, with reference to social re-ordering after the war. The lines of action—intelligent, organized and coöperative action—must, of course, be determined from a consideration of these points of weakness which I have pointed out; and I have spent so much time on the negative side of the question because until we know where the weak points are, the deficiencies, the ills, and the diseases, we can have, of course, no clear cue as to where to direct our intelligent efforts.

The first great demand of a better social order, I should say, then, is the guarantee of the right, to every individual who is capable of it, to work—not the mere legal right, but a right which is enforceable so that the individual will always have the opportunity to engage in some form of useful activity; and if the ordinary economic machinery breaks down through a crisis of some sort, then it is the duty of the state to come to the rescue and see that individuals have something to do that is worth while—not breaking stone in a stone yard, or something else to get a soup ticket with, but some kind of productive work which a self-respecting person may engage in with interest and with more than mere pecuniary profit. Whatever may be said about the fortunes of what has technically been called socialism, it would seem to be simply the part of ordinary common

sense that society should reorganize itself to make sure that individuals can make a living and be kept going, not by charity, but by having productive work to do.

In the second place, war has revealed the possibilities (this is simply repeating what I have already said) of intelligent administration—administration which will raise and maintain on a higher level the general standard and scale of living. The minimum wage is not one of the visions of the nations that have been longer in the war than we have; it is not, with them, a dream, an uplift notion: it is an accomplished fact. Great Britain is already spending an immense amount of money for the housing of its laborers, and, as we have found out in connection with our shipping program, we can not do what we have got to do, unless we first see to it that there are decent, comfortable and sanitary housing facilities for the population. One of the demands which has already been made in England, which would help, also, to take care of the unemployment problem after the war, is that this great work of housing, conducted under national social auspices, shall go on until the slums, with their bad sanitary, moral, and bad aesthetic influence, have disappeared and every individual has a home to live in and surroundings to live in which observe the ordinary amenities of human life. The movements for insurance against accident, insurance against illness, insurance against the contingencies of old age, which were already active before the war, have also, of course, been given a tremendous acceleration.

Now these are all phases of keeping up the standard of livelihood—not merely of economic livelihood, but of physical, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic livelihood on the part of the great wage earning masses of the population; and as I have already said, the war has shown that even with the extraordinary demand upon the thought and the attention and the energy upon the battlefield, there is still left over, in time of war, enough ability and energy to deal much more effectively with these questions than they were being dealt with before the war. That means that there can be no excuse for any delay when there comes a time of greater

leisure. Upon the cessation of the stress of the war, society can take hold of these problems in a much more vigorous, intellectual and systematic way than ever before.

The third phase that I mention is the need of securing greater industrial autonomy, that is to say, greater ability on the part of the workers in any particular trade or occupation to control that industry, instead of working under these conditions of external control where they have no interest, no insight into what they are doing, and no social outlook upon the consequences and meaning of what they are doing. It is often said that the war has given an enormous stimulus, temporarily, at least, to state socialism. But if any one notes what is actually going on in Great Britain and in this country, he will conclude, I think, that it is not so much unmitigated state socialism, as what we might call industrial socialism that is being promulgated. Great Britain, for example, has not taken the ownership of the railways, nor the coal mines and other great industries. It would be very difficult to say who does own them any more. What has happened is that the government now insists upon having its representative—that is to say, a representative of the interests of the community as a whole, of the state and nation, on every controlling board. The investors, the owners of the stocks, et cetera, have also a representative; but it has also been found that in order to maintain complete efficiency, the laborers themselves have to have a representative.

That, in the main, has been the direction in which economic and industrial reorganization is taking during the war, first in Great Britain, where they have had a longer experience, and it seems to have pretty well marked the path upon which we are entering. This does not involve absolute state ownership and absolute state control, but rather a kind of conjoined supervision and regulation, with supervisors and arbiters, as it were, to look after the public interests, the interests of the consumer, the interests of the population as a whole, others to represent those who have their capital immediately invested, and others to represent those who have their lives (in the form of work) immediately invested.

And just because, under the stress of war, things so naturally and almost inevitably take that direction, it seems to me that that is the line of future social reorganization, if it goes on in a continuous, orderly way. But this means an increasing share given to the laborer, to the wage earner, in controlling the conditions of his own activity. It is so common now to point out the absurdity of conducting a war for political democracy which leaves industrial and economic autocracy practically untouched, that I think we are absolutely bound to see, after the war, either a period of very great unrest, disorder, drifting, strife—I would not say actual civil war, but all kinds of irregular strife and disorder, or a movement to install the principle of self-government within industries.

These three things, then, seem to me the essential minimum elements of an intelligent program of social reorganization:

First, the securing for all of steady occupation or employment;

Second, through administration under state and municipal auspices, the raising and maintaining at a higher level of the general standard of living; and,

Third, the continuous, steady, even if slow, promotion of industrial democracy, industrial self-government in the various chief lines of economic activity of society.

In closing, then, I may refer to the words of President Sanford. It does seem to me altogether probable that, if we project ourselves into the future and take the standpoint of a historian looking back, while emphasis may be put upon certain lines of international reorganization and general political and dynastic changes which have resulted, it is altogether probable that the chief emphasis will be put rather upon this phase of the matter, that in order to become efficient in waging war under modern conditions, where the whole population has to be largely organized and mobilized, the most permanent and significant and far-reaching changes have come from this reorganization of the social forces; that is, the means that had to be used in order to wage the war effectively and to win the war, changed the

way in which human forces were handled and organized. And this will produce effects which, in the long run, will be the most significant of any. And it will be seen that, as we are dimly vaguely realizing today that the social order in which we are living is not the product of anything that can rightfully be called natural law, that it is not the product of intelligent insight, intelligent foresight and control, but that it is rather the historical accident due to the converging, at a certain period of history, of a large number of forces which happened to come together, the future historian may say, if the issue of the present event is as happy and fortunate as we would like to have it, that this war represents the period when mankind realized how largely its forces had been left to drift at the mercy of accident, and so decided to bring to bear upon the conduct of public affairs, upon the conduct of the common interests of mankind the same kind of intelligence, the same kind of forethought, the same kind of organized control that up to the time of the war had been devoted to private affairs.